

Oral history with 17 year old white male, Breathitt County, Kentucky (Transcription)

END OF EXCERPT Begin M20 A(2)

The next excerpt is taken from original tape W 102.

RESPONDENT: I live at Stray Branch and I was born at () and I have two brothers and seven sisters.

QUESTIONER: That's a fairly large family. I think her family, she has seven or eight brothers and sisters, I think. <unintelligible text> When were you born?

R: October second.

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Q: What year?

R: 1955.

Q: Okay, yeah, I guess you're about the same age.

Where'd you start school? Your first ...

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R: Down here. At LBJ.

Q: And, how long did you go?

R: I went till the seventh grade.

Q: And then what happened?

R: My mother was in the hospital to be operated-on. I quit on account of her to take care of the kids.

Q: Did she, did she get alright?

R: Yes, she's alright, but she's got a tumor on her head, you know. It's burned-down to the ().

Q: Does that, I mean, is she still able to get around?

R: Yeah, but she ain't got the right mind, you know. She kind of queer-acting, you know.

Q: Do you , does she go to the doctor, or can you do anything for it?

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R: The doctors told her, see, that they could treat her. That they wasn't one in a hundred lived that come out from under the operating said that they could operate but couldn't tell her whether she'd come out from under it or not.

Q: So did she get an operation that time, or just like they started to operate but then couldn't. You know when, when you said you were in seventh grade.

R: No, see, she was operated-on for a gall bladder. And they operated on her five times. And that's the reason I quit school,

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on account of her, you know.

Q: What about your dad, how is he?

R: He's not too good. He's, works down at the National Guard Armory.

Q: What's he do down there?

R: He just mops and sweeps and keeps it cleaned up.

Q: And are some of the kids still at home, I mean how many kids are still at home?

R: They say there's two.

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Q: You and ...?

R: No, now there's four of us. There's me and <unintelligible text> and <unintelligible text> and <unintelligible text>... I mean <unintelligible text> and <unintelligible text>

Q: And all four of the others?

R: They all at school.

Q: Where do they go to school?

R: Let's see. Two of them, two, three of them go down to the one at ().

Q: So they're still, they're still pretty young.

R: Yeah.

Q: When was LBJ built?

R: I don't know.

Q: Because I thought, I guess I thought it was newer than it was. But you went down here, huh?

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R: Yeah.

Q: It when the new building? Well, that's good. I guess I thought it was just a couple of years old. Where did your mom and dad go to school? Did they

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go to school in the county?

R: I couldn't tell you where they went. I never did ask them.

Q: And what about your dad? What did he do before he started working over here at the armory?

R: He worked in the mines.

Q: Did he have, I talked to some people who, you know, had accident and all in the mines, did he have any problems?

R: Yeah, he had one that something, some slate fell, hit him in the back. Strained his back. His back, his back still ().

Q: Does, is he able to get any sort of pension from the coal company?

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R: He signed-up on that back long, but he ain't never heard from it since he's been signed-up. He's been signed-up for a little over a year now. And he ain't heard from it since, he signed-up.

Q: Is that a problem for a lot of men, to, you know, do the coal companies give pensions very much, or is it like hard for them to get ...

R: It's hard for them to get it. If they ain't got over about ten or fifteen years in the mines, they can't get it.

Q: Is, are the mines still open now? How, how's the mining situation in the county?

R: I wouldn't know. He's been quit, he quit when I was about seven years old. Quit working in the mine.

Q: What about where your folks live? Is that sort of like a small community? Are there a number of families there or is

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it just, you know, one or two?

R: Well they's right smart living over there where we's live.

Q: Is there a school or a church and a store?

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R: Well, there's a church, but it's along Mills Branch. We goes from Strays Branch to Mills Branch if there's meeting.

Q: What kind of church is it?

R: It's a Baptist.

Q: And what about the school up there?

R: Well, they did have school up there, right above where we live. And they cut, took, cut it out, put it over here at (). Moved the people over to the Red.

Q: Oh, so all the kids could ().

R: Yeah.

Q: When did you get on the Youth Corps program?

R: I guess I've been working on it for about three months.

Q: How'd you know about it, I mean how did you get started on it?

R: Let's see. <unintelligible text> a neighbor down there, he worked on it. And he told me when I got fourteen, he told me that I could sign-up on that. And I just come down here

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and put an application in, they called me. The first time they called me, my dad wouldn't let me go work.

Q: How come?

R: 'Cause he was afraid that I wouldn't hold out the, you know, take a job in the (), and then I went back down there when I come seventeen, and they give, they give me the job.

Q: So if he, is he happy about it now?

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R: Yeah.

Q: He thinks it's a good thing?

R: Yeah.

Q: <unintelligible text> was telling me her dad works for Operation Mainstream or some, one of the programs. Does your dad work for any of the () programs?

R: Yeah, he's working on that OEO program right now, I think. That's the name of it he's on, but you know he's, they've got him working up there at the armory, he's ...

Q: Oh, is he? So they pay him to work there?

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R: Yeah.

Q: What is the armory like? Is it a meeting place or something?

R: Yeah. They drill up there, you know. These army boys.

Q: Oh, I see. Oh.

R: And then then they clean up, they clean up after them.

Q: Are there a lot of them up there all the time?

R: Yeah, they's right smart, they hang around up there.

Q: Do you think you'll have to go in the army? Or ...

R: I guess I will. If I, nothing don't happen between now and then.

Q: What about, what do you think, what else do you think might you do. How long can you work here?

R: Two years on this job I'm on.

Q: And then what will happen, do you think? What will you do?

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R: Well, see they's supposed to cut this job out July the fifteenth, I think. And if they cut this out, I'll wait till I get eighteen, then I'm going to Richmond, Indiana.

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Q: What'll you do there?

R: Work in a plaskits factory. Where they make plaskit.

Q: What, maybe do you have some friends there? Or some relatives?

R: Yeah, I have a half-brother out there.

Q: Was there a problem, you know, with jobs for the young kids?

R: Out there?

Q: No, here in () County.

R: Yeah, they have to be so old before they can get on this.

Q: Yeah, but what about other jobs, are there other jobs available?

R: As far as I know of, I never did aks around. Just the time a heared about this and I put in an application.

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Q: What about, you know, maybe sometimes there's a job problem but is there a housing problem, are there enough houses for people to live in?

R: Yeah, I reckon.

Q: Do people just generally, you know, within their own family, just build a house? Or are there any government money for people to build their houses?

R: No, they just build them by themselves, you know. They cuts their lumber.

Q: What about your house? Did your dad build it?

R: No, we just rent where we live.

Q: Do most of the people where you live rent, or do they own their own houses?

R: Most of them rents.

Q: Who owns the houses?

R: Let's see. One (), the grocer owns it. And (), let's

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see, I forget his first name, owns the one <unintelligible text> lives in. I think. And then <unintelligible text>, she owns her own place. She lives on it.

Q: Do, do the people who rent their houses, do they keep them up in good shape? Or do people who, you know, live in them, have a problem with keeping them up?

R: Yeah, yeah, they, the ones that live in them, a renter, see, the renter that rents off the man that's, the men that own the house, it's very seldom that he comes in and checks on it. And they have to keep it up.

Q: Do they have indoor plumbing and all, or do they, haven't they, have they not fixed them up like that?

R: Uh-uh. What plumbing we do, we did ourselves. You know, (), we do it ourselves.

Q: Did you have to put in plumbing in the place where you live?

R: Yeah, we put partitions up.

Q: Did you have to put in pipes and bring all the water into the house?

R: Uh-uh.

Q: Do you have a well in the back, or how?

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R: We have a well, yeah. We draw water.

Q: And what about heating, is there a heating system?

R: No we heat by coal stove.

Q: Is there a problem getting coal, is coal expensive?

R: Yeah. It's, where we live, we have a problem getting it over there, you know. It's, it's hard getting them down that hill. We live up on the crest of a hill.

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Q: Is there a road up?

R: Yeah, but it's awful steep, you know... They'll go up through there and the brakes will go out. You can't control it through there.

Q: So do you have to bring your own coal in, or can a coal truck does a coal truck come by?

R: Coal truck can't bring it. Coal truck (). We haul it ourself with our, you know, our pick-up.

Q: How long does the supply of coal last?

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R: Not too long. If it's real cold, but you know if it ain't too cold it lasts a smart while.

Q: What, have you heard your, you know, when your parents were growing up, I'm sure things were very different in the county, have you heard them talk about, you know, as to how things were?

R: Yeah, my dad said when he was growing up, said that, always said that you had to go out and haul corn from the break of daylight till dark. He said and you'd come in and you'd just have to eat what was left over. And things like that.

Q: How are things now? Do you think they're much better?

R: Yeah, I think they are.

Q: What are some of the changes that you can even see, you know in the last few years?

R: Well, let's see.

Q: Roads or buildings ...?

R: Yeah. They've straightened the roads up right smart now. And they're building new homes.

Q: What about people, do they seem different now? Than what

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